

Turning Readers into Cheaters? The Impact of Immoral Behavior on Experience-taking

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### **Abstract**

Experience-taking is the process by which readers simulate the subjective experience of a fictional character, encountering story events alongside the character's thoughts and emotions and adopting them as their own. This study sought to identify whether key independent variables – namely, the valence of a character's behavior and the timing of its revelation - would affect readers' likelihood of experience-taking. We hypothesized that delaying the revelation of a character's immoral behavior would produce greater experience-taking and greater acceptance of the character's behavior than an early revelation. In a laboratory session, 73 Ohio State undergraduates read one of three versions of a narrative about a college student's day. Two of the narratives depicted a character who copied a roommate's homework assignment without permission; this immoral behavior occurred either towards the beginning or the end of the story. In the third (no immoral behavior) narrative, the character completed the assignment unaided. Participants then completed an experience-taking measure and other measures. The session ended with a behavioral measure of cheating. Participants received extremely difficult remote associates on which better performance meant a greater chance to win \$20. To measure participants' inclinations to cheat, we gave them an opportunity to misreport the actual number they answered correctly. Results revealed that the timing of the immoral behavior did not have a significant impact on experience-taking levels. However, the participants in the no immoral behavior condition notably rated the character as more "good" than did the participants in both of the immoral behavior conditions. Participants' inclinations to cheat did not differ between story conditions. Future studies are suggested with modifications to help understand the current study.

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### Turning Readers into Cheaters? The Impact of Immoral Behavior on Experience-taking

Within 24 hours of the release for *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* by JK Rowling on July 21, 2007, 8.3 million copies had been sold and people around the world were eagerly reading this final installment of the Harry Potter series (Blais & DeBarros, 2007).

Simultaneously rejoicing and mourning the final book in the series, readers lined up outside bookstores for days in order to be the first one to purchase the new book (Wilford, 2007). Part of the reason Rowling's Harry Potter series has become so popular is her ability to draw in readers as well as make them feel emotionally invested in the outcome of the book and its characters. The beloved and iconic characters in Harry Potter have impacted readers' lives and behaviors, for example, by leading readers to practice wand motions to cast spells from the popular book series (Wilford, 2007; Grant, 2007). Many readers most likely connected with the series' title character, Harry Potter. Harry fights the evil wizard Voldemort throughout the books as he showcases his own courage and willpower to defeat evil. By simulating the subjective experience of Harry, readers might have believed that good will conquer evil and that they themselves could play a role in the prevalent theme.

Harry, always on the side of good, is contrasted (and thwarted) throughout the novel with the character of Severus Snape, who toes the line between good and evil. Snape's moral ambiguity is showcased repeatedly by conquering evil in one scene and perpetuating evil in another. The countdown to the release of the final book in the series included the most anticipated answer to the question: Is Severus Snape good or evil? (Berman, 2007; Scholastic, 2007) When readers simulate the subjective experience of Harry Potter, they are seeing life through the lens of constant courage and standing up in the face of evil. But, when readers simulate the subjective experience of Snape, what causes them to see his actions through a

positive or negative lens? As “countless essays have been written to justify both positions” (Berman, 2007), such negative behavior can potentially be construed in a positive light. The current study is interested in deciphering how a reader might take on the subjective experience of a potentially immoral character like Snape and how a reader’s beliefs or behaviors change as a result of such experience-taking. What inspires readers to take on Snape’s subjective experience and understand his thoughts, feelings, and emotions? Also, what effect does the experience have on their subsequent behaviors?

### **Defining and the Antecedents of Experience-Taking**

When readers approach a book or story, they can simply read as a spectator and not immerse themselves in the characters or plot. Another approach to reading involves opening oneself to the characters’ perspectives and actually feeling like a part of the story as opposed to a simple spectator (e.g. Cohen, 2001; Kaufman & Libby, in press). Experience-taking occurs when “readers simulate the events of a narrative as though they were a particular character in the story world, adopting the character’s mindset and perspective as the story progresses rather than orienting themselves as an observer or evaluator of the character” (Kaufman & Libby, in press). Readers leave behind their own identities and self-concepts in order to take on the subjective experience of the character. By varying the accessibility of participants’ self-concept using mirrors, experience-taking levels were significantly lower for participants able to see their reflections (high self-concept accessibility) when compared to a control group who read the same narrative in front of a mirror with the non-reflective side showing (Kaufman & Libby, in press). Engaging in experience-taking requires a reader to leave the self behind and step into the role of the character in the narrative.

What factors might make experience-taking more likely to occur when a character

behaves immorally? The timing of revealing certain facts about a character affects levels of experience-taking. For example, revealing a character's out-group membership (i.e. sexual orientation, university enrollment) in relation to the reader late in the narrative elicits higher experience-taking levels than revealing out-group membership early in the narrative (Kaufman & Libby, in press). In a separate study, revealing the racial identity of a character engaging in ambiguously hostile behaviors (e.g. avoiding a petitioner on the sidewalk, demanding money back from a store clerk for no reason) either early or late in the narrative showed significant differences in experience-taking levels (Kaufman & Libby, in press). When racial identity was revealed at the end of the narrative (but before the ambiguous behaviors), experience-taking scores were higher than when racial identity was revealed at the beginning of the narrative. In this "late reveal" condition, readers had already sufficiently simulated the character's experience and that process was not deterred by revealing the racial out-group membership. The opposite occurred when out-group membership was revealed at the beginning of the narrative because its salience prevented the identity-taking process from ever starting (Kaufman & Libby, in press). In effect, the delayed revelation of a potentially aversive fact about the character led to a greater acceptance of the character because of the reader's already high level of experience-taking. Building on these findings, we believe that there will be the same differences in levels of experience-taking when an immoral behavior (rather than out-group membership) is described at the beginning versus near the end of a narrative.

### **Effects of Experience-Taking**

Simulating the subjective experience of a character can have an immense impact on a reader's thoughts, emotions, or goals not only during the story but also after the story is over because of a deep connection between character and reader. Once the reader leaves the story the

reader's behavior can change based on the simulated thoughts, emotions and goals (Kaufman & Libby, in press; Cupchik, 1994; Green & Brock, 2000; Dal Cin, Gibson, Zanna, Shumante, & Fong, 2007; Gabriel & Young, 2011). For example, when participants reading a written narrative simulated the subjective experience of a character who voted on Election Day, they were more likely to go to the polls to cast a vote themselves (Kaufman & Libby, in press). Would this same phenomenon occur with an immoral character?

When participants identified with a smoking protagonist in a movie clip, they were more likely to associate "self" with "smoking", as seen using an Implicit Association Test (IAT) (Dal Cin et al., 2007). In a similar study using written narratives, participants associated themselves with the type of character they read about (Gabriel & Young, 2011). Participants in this study either read an excerpt from *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* or *Twilight*. After reading the chapter, participants completed IATs whose results showed that those who read about wizards in *Harry Potter* associated "me" with "wizard." Comparatively, those who read about vampires in *Twilight* associated "me" with "vampire" (Gabriel & Young, 2011). Both studies provide examples of the potential for narratives to persuade individuals to change their self-concept and behaviors. Lastly, violent movies, T.V., and video games have all been shown to increase aggression in children even into their adult lives (Anderson, 2004; Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003). The current study continues to investigate the outcomes of simulating the experience of an immoral character with the hypothesis that participants who show higher experience-taking levels will be more likely to participate in the immoral behavior themselves.

### **The Current Study**

The primary purpose of the current study is to extend the previous research and its theoretical perspective by determining whether readers could take on the subjective experience

of an immoral character, particularly if the revelation of the immoral behavior came later in the story. In varying when the immoral behavior occurs, we hope to elicit experience-taking for an immoral character.

The current study also hopes to extend the research exploring experience-taking as a psychological process effecting change in the reader. We predict that if participants simulate the subjective experience of the immoral character, then they will be more likely to act immorally if given the opportunity. This study will test whether individuals could be persuaded to engage in the immoral behavior of cheating as a direct result of taking on the subjective experience of the main character in the narrative.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

35 male and 36 female (ages 18-47, average: 19.68) introductory psychology students from The Ohio State University were recruited to participate in this study in exchange for class credit. Other than being required to be at least 18 years of age, participants were not excluded from recruitment for this study for any reasons.

### **Procedure and Materials**

After entering the laboratory, participants were instructed to sit at individual computer stations. In front of each participant was a packet containing a narrative followed by several questionnaires. Participants were randomly assigned to read one of three different two-page narratives specifically created for this study. Representing the three different conditions in the study, each narrative contained a similar storyline depicting a first-year college student waking up on a Saturday thinking it is a weekday. The thoughts and feelings of the character were



revealed to the reader through descriptive first-person accounts such as, “*I didn’t see any harm in comparing Sam’s answers with my own.*”

The character, whose gender was never explicitly revealed, focuses on finishing an extra credit biology assignment. All three stories were identical except for the paragraph describing the actual completion of the assignment at the beginning (early condition and no immoral condition) or near the end (late condition) of the story. In search of a ruler, the character sees his roommate’s biology binder on the desk. In the immoral behavior conditions, the character also notices the completed assignment sticking out of the binder, takes the assignment, and compares answers. The character changes any discrepancies between the two assignments to the answer on the roommate’s assignment. In the no immoral behavior condition, the character does not see his roommate’s completed assignment; instead, he grabs the ruler and returns to complete his own assignment. These manipulations follow from previous work with narratives and experience-taking (Kaufman & Libby, in press). The narratives also include some background information about the character as well as the idea that the character wants to live a full and happy life. They conclude with the character going for a run.

All participants read their assigned narrative and then completed the following dependent measures. At the end of the paper packet, participants also indicated their own gender and age before beginning the cheating behavior measure on the computer.

**Experience-taking measure.** After participants read their assigned narrative, they completed seven items to assess their levels of experience-taking. This measure assesses the extent to which readers simulated the subjective experience of the character in the story based on their agreement with statements such as, “I found myself feeling what the character in the story

was feeling,” each utilizing a 9-point scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree” 9 = “Strongly Agree;” Kaufman & Libby, in press).

**Character evaluation.** Participants then completed four items assessing their evaluation of the character. These items utilized 9-point (-4 to 4) semantic differentials scales with the following pairs of descriptors: bad vs. good, not similar to me vs. similar to me, not likable vs. likable, and we don’t think alike vs. we think alike.

**Visual imagery.** A visual imagery measure was used to determine which visual perspective participants were using to imagine the events in the story. The 7-point scale utilized the endpoints: (1) “While I was reading the story, I pictured the story through the eyes of the main character” vs. “While I was reading the story, I pictured the story as an observer of the main character;” (2) “While I was reading the story, I felt like I was witnessing the events of the story rather than actually doing them myself” vs. “While I was reading the story, I felt like I was doing the events in the story rather than witnessing them;” and (3) “While I was reading the story, I shifted my point of view of the story between an observer’s perspective and the main character’s perspective” vs. “While I was reading the story, I maintained the same point of view (either an observer’s or the main character’s) for the entire story.”

**Transportation.** The transportation scale (Green and Brock, 2000) measures the “emotional involvement in the story, cognitive attention to the story, feelings of suspense, lack of awareness of surroundings, and mental imagery” (p. 703) of the reader after reading the narrative. Participants rated their agreement with 11 statements on a 7-point scale (1 = “Not at All” to 7 = “Very Much”). Items included “I was mentally involved in the story while reading it” and “After finishing the story, I found it easy to put it out of my mind” (Green & Brock 2000).

**Assumed character gender.** At the end of the paper packet, participants were prompted to indicate the gender of the character in the story. This measure aimed to capture participants' assumptions about the character's gender since it was never explicitly stated in the narrative.

**Cheating behavior measure.** Participants were then directed to follow the instructions on the computer screen in front of them to complete a behavioral dependent measure designed to give them the opportunity to cheat on a remote associates task. Participants were told that the computer task was separate from the original study. Traditionally used to measure creative thinking and problem solving abilities, remote associate problems require respondents to provide one solution word that best links three presented words (Bowden & Jung-Beeman, 2003). For example, the word *sugar* correctly links the words Cane/Daddy/Plum by means of creating compound words with each.

In the present study, participants were asked to solve ten remote associate problems in eight minutes. Participants were told that for every item they answered correctly, they would receive a raffle entry (i.e. answering 5 remote associates correctly meant 5 raffle entries) to win a prize of \$20. Of the set of ten remote associates given to participants to solve, two were easy and eight were very difficult, as determined by low correct completion rates in a previous study by Bowden and Jung-Beeman (2003). Thus, we expected that correct completion of any of the eight difficult items would be uncommon in this study as well.

After attempting to solve the set of ten remote associate problems, participants were shown the solutions to the problems on the computer screen. Participants scored their own written answers and were not asked to show their answers to the experimenter. Then, participants selected the number on the computer screen that corresponded to the number of items they answered correctly. If they reported answering any of the remote associates correctly, the

computer prompted participants to provide an email address in order to be contacted in case they won the drawing for \$20. Because we did not expect that the manipulation of narrative would affect actual performance on the remote associates task, we assumed that any differences in the average number of problems reported correct between conditions were due to differences in cheating.

## **Results**

One participant provided the same response for every item, including reverse-coded items, suggesting the participant did not take the task seriously. This participant was excluded from analyses, as was another participant who incorrectly completed the computer portion of the experiment first. Furthermore, any participant who finished reading the narrative and answering the associated questionnaires in a time more than two standard deviations above or below the mean participants time was excluded from analyses. Two participants fit this qualification, both of whom finished the narrative portion faster than any other participants, suggesting they had not taken the time necessary to fully read the narrative and/or accurately respond to the dependent measures. For the following analyses, there were 69 participants in the data set (35 female and 34 male, mean age: 19.54 years,  $SD = 3.58$ ). There were 22 participants in the early immoral behavior condition, 24 participants in the late immoral behavior condition and 23 participants in the no immoral behavior condition.

### **Experience-Taking**

First, we created an index of experience-taking by averaging responses to the 8 questions in the measure ( $\alpha=.83$ ), with higher scores indicating that the reader reported taking on the subjective experience of the reader to a greater extent. We then submitted the experience-taking index to a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), using transportation scores as the

covariate. Although transportation scores were not significantly different across conditions ( $F(2, 65)=.37, p=.69$ ), transportation was significantly correlated with experience-taking ( $r=.50, p<.01$ ). Thus, we wanted to isolate the effect of the story manipulation on experience-taking, apart from any potential effects of transportation on experience-taking. However, contrary to our hypothesis, the ANCOVA revealed no significant effect of story condition on experience-taking ( $F(2, 64) = 2.22, p=.12$ )

In additional analyses, planned contrasts showed that composite experience-taking scores in the no immoral behavior condition ( $M= 6.70, SD =1.18$ ) were not significantly higher than the average of the scores in the two immoral behavior conditions ( $M=6.24, SD =1.34, t(1, 66) = 1.42, p=.16$ ). Although the effects were not significant, patterns showed that participants in the no immoral behavior condition reported higher experience-taking scores ( $M = 6.70, SD = 1.19$ ) than those in either the early ( $M = 6.30, SD = 1.26$ ) or late ( $M = 6.19, SD = 1.43$ ) immoral conditions, see Figure 1.

### **Cheating Behavior**

Because of we did not expect the story manipulation to affect actual correct completion of the anagram items, we assumed that any differences across narrative conditions for the number of remote associates reported correct was a result of differences in cheating. Using a one-way ANOVA, no significant differences appeared in the number of answers reported correct between the early immoral ( $M = 3.27, SD = 2.80$ ), the late immoral behavior ( $M = 2.63, SD = 2.29$ ), and the no immoral behavior ( $M=2.43, SD = 2.29$ ) conditions ( $F(2,66)=.88, p=.42$ ). Although not significantly different, the mean reported correct are higher for each immoral behavior condition than the no immoral behavior condition.

We also conducted a secondary analysis of the number reported correct, using an alternative operationalization of cheating that rests on an additional assumption. Because eight of the ten items on the remote associates task were very difficult and showed low completion rates in previous research, reports of more than two correct could be considered a sign of cheating. Indeed, across all conditions more than half of the participants ( $n = 36$ ) reported getting more than two remote associates correct, suggesting the possibility that cheating was occurring to some extent. To test the degree of cheating in each condition, according to this alternative operationalization of cheating, we conducted a one sample t-test within each condition, comparing average number reported correct against 2. Results revealed that the mean reported correct was significantly greater than 2 in both the early- ( $M=3.27$ ,  $SD = 2.80$ ,  $t(21) = 2.13$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and late- ( $M = 2.63$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ,  $t(23) = 2.17$ ,  $p = .04$ ) cheating conditions, but not in the no-cheating condition ( $M = 2.43$ ,  $SD = 2.29$ ,  $t(22) = .91$ ,  $p = .37$ ). These results suggest that participants in the conditions in which the character cheated were engaging in cheating themselves, whereas participants in the condition in which the character did not cheat, were not.

### **Correlation between Experience-Taking and Cheating**

Although our narrative manipulation did not definitively influence cheating scores, we tested our hypothesis that participants with higher experience-taking would also be more likely to cheat. No correlations existed between our experience-taking index and the number of remotes associates participants reported correct in the early immoral behavior ( $r=.10$ ,  $p=.67$ ), late immoral behavior ( $r= -.01$ ,  $p=.98$ ), or no immoral behavior ( $r=.26$ ,  $p=.22$ ) conditions.

### **Other Measures**

We used a one-way ANOVA to test the effect of narrative condition on each of the remaining dependent measures. Narrative condition marginally affected participants' ratings of

the character as “good” or “bad” ( $F(2, 66)=2.55, p=.09$ ). To further investigate, a planned contrast showed that participants in the no immoral condition rated the character as relatively more good ( $M=7.09, SD=1.59$ ) than those in the immoral behavior conditions ( $M=6.15, SD=1.61, t(1, 66)=2.25, p<.03$ , see Table 1).

Next, we analyzed the remaining character evaluation data. Narrative condition had no significant effect on participants’ ratings of similarity between the character and themselves ( $F(2, 66)=.03, p=.97$ ), on whether participants believed the character was “likable” or “not likable” ( $F(2, 66)=.50, p=.61$ ), nor on whether participants indicated that they and the character “think alike” or “do not think alike” ( $F(2, 66)=.09, p=.91$ ). The individual means and standard deviations can be found in Table 1.

No significant differences existed between conditions for the three visual imagery questions. Two of the three questions were averaged to elicit a composite “perspective” visual imagery score ( $\alpha=.74$ ). Participants’ mean scores did not differ between narrative condition when asked to rate whether they pictured the story from a first-person perspective or a third-person perspective, ( $F(2, 66)=.85, p=.43$ ). For the third question, participants did not differ in any tendencies to shift or maintain perspectives while reading the narrative ( $F(2, 66)=.16, p=.85$ ). The individual means and standard deviations for the “perspective” and “maintaining perspective” visual imagery scores can be found in Table 2.

## Discussion

This study sought to discover what impact reading about an immoral character has on participants’ likelihood of simulating the subjective experience of the character. We were also interested in the effect of simulating the subjective experience of an immoral character. Specifically, we hypothesized that the timing of cheating behavior in the narrative would affect

participants' levels of experience-taking and that higher experience-taking levels would encourage cheating. Contrary to the hypotheses, the point at which the cheating behavior occurred during the story did not affect participants' levels of experience-taking. Neither narrative condition nor experience-taking levels definitively affected cheating behavior.

Although the difference was not significant, the pattern of means was consistent with the idea that participants were less likely to take on the subjective experience of a cheating character. Finally, by an alternative definition of cheating, participants seemed to cheat more when they read about a character who cheated than when they read about a character who did not cheat.

### **Explanation of Experience-taking Results and Suggestions**

One possible explanation for why the timing of the cheating behavior in the narrative did not influence experience-taking levels is that, even in the late condition, the story did not provide enough substance and details for the reader to take on the subjective experience of the character before the cheating behavior occurred. Although successful past studies (Kaufman & Libby, in press) utilized narratives similar in length to the ones used in the current study, more character depth might be necessary to allow experience-taking to occur for explicitly negative behaviors by the character. The trait negativity bias supports this idea, stating that negative attributes weigh more than positive ones in evaluating a person's character (Kassin, Fein, & Markus, 2008, p. 117). For an immoral character, as opposed to a moral character, the reader would need more reasons to sufficiently take on the subjective experience of the character, accepting the immoral behavior and then participating in the behavior.

If participants read a longer, more developed narrative that included more information about the character as well as his/her thoughts, feelings and motivations, they could be more likely to simulate the subjective experience of an immoral character. With more information and



insight about the character, the reader has more opportunity to truly understand the character and make up for the negativity bias. We would predict that in the late reveal condition, the reader would be more likely to take on the subjective experience of the character. As long as the character acts rationally, the reader should be able to follow along in truly understanding and internalizing the character's motivations. In the early reveal condition, the reader cannot immediately understand the character's immoral behavior and will therefore not be as likely to share in the subjective experience of the character.

Another possible factor that could affect experience-taking with immoral characters would be whether or not the character provides an explicit reason for acting immorally to the reader. To go one step further, we could vary the validity of the reasoning for the cheating behavior. For example, the story could reveal what caused the character to cheat on a homework assignment. The character could have been at a party the night before or have fallen asleep at the hospital taking care of friend the night before. Waking up the next morning, the character realizes there is not enough time to finish the assignment. In this scenario, the reason for the cheating behavior would appear at the beginning of the narrative with the cheating behavior itself appearing either directly after the reasoning or later in the narrative. We would predict that with the valid reasoning (i.e. falling asleep in the hospital); experience-taking levels would not differ between the early and late immoral behavior conditions. For the invalid reasoning conditions (i.e. partying), we would predict a difference between the early and late immoral behavior conditions. When the cheating behavior appears at the beginning of the story, the reader can see the character as originally bad and this condition will block experience-taking. When the cheating behavior appears later in the story, the reader has time to understand the character's motivations and experience-taking will occur.

### **Explanation of Cheating Results and Suggestions**

In addition, no significant differences existed between narrative conditions on our primary measure of cheating on the remote associates task. A small number of people spread across the narrative conditions reported getting more than half of the remote associates correct, a presumably impossible feat, which could suggest a floor effect on cheating. A floor effect suggests that the participants either did not realize that they could cheat or were not motivated to cheat.

After assuming that a reported score above two on the remote associates task constituted cheating, significant effects within conditions emerged. This operationalization of cheating assumed that the story did not have any effect on actual abilities and that people got the two easy remote associates correct if they reported getting 2 remote associates correct but that if they reported any more correct, they were cheating. Because we cannot prove our assumptions are correct, we realize that this result is not completely sound. Still, using this conception of cheating, participants cheated when exposed to the cheating character. Consistent with previous research, this finding suggests that exposure to a negative character encourages negative modeling (e.g. Dal Cin et al, 2007; Gabriel & Young, 2011).

Future studies should utilize a different design that makes the possibility of cheating as well as the definition of cheating more explicit. In the task used, participants received one entry for every remote associate they answered correctly toward a chance to win \$20. Therefore, by only answering one remote associate problem correct, participants could win the reward. Some participants could have been content with just one chance and were not motivated to maximize their chances in receiving the reward by reporting answering all ten problems correctly. In future

studies, we would employ a more direct behavioral measure forcing participants to behave immorally in order to receive the reward.

One option to improve the cheating measure used in this study is to supply participants with an answer sheet that has an incorrect answer to one of the problems. If a participant reports getting all problems correct, they would clearly have cheated in order to win a reward for getting a perfect score. Participants would either score their own answer sheets and report to the computer or have the computer tell them how many problems they solved correctly before reporting to the experimenter.

Another option to improve the cheating measure is to allow participants to reward themselves for answering the problems correctly. Participants could be told that they will receive a dollar for every problem they answered correctly on a set of impossible problems or problems with incorrect answers. Participants would retrieve payment from an envelope in the laboratory without having to come in contact with the experimenter.

### **The Relationship between Experience-Taking and Cheating**

In our original hypotheses, we predicted that higher experience-taking scores of an immoral character will encourage higher tendencies to cheat. Unfortunately, our narrative manipulation did not affect experience-taking. Similarly, experience-taking levels were not correlated with cheating scores. The low variation between experience-taking scores, cheating scores, or both might have blocked any visible relationships between the variables. Future studies utilizing both a successful narrative manipulation and a clearer cheating measure could demonstrate a relationship between experience-taking and cheating scores. Both of these improvements have already been discussed.

### **Explanation of Additional Results and Suggestions**

Even though it did not confirm our initial hypothesis, the finding that participants were able to perceive the cheating character as less good in relation to the neutral character is important. Previous research has shown the influence a good character can have on the reader's actions (Kaufman & Libby, in press). This research attempted to address how much influence an immoral character would have on the reader's actions. Although readers did not significantly differ in experience-taking scores between conditions, the trends found between the cheating and non-cheating conditions concerning the "goodness" of the character shows that an immoral character is inherently different from a moral character. Because the experience-taking scores did not show a similar difference between the immoral and non-immoral conditions, it is reasonable to infer that being immoral does not completely block experience-taking. Therefore, there must be a missing component in our logic that experience-taking directly results from the single dimension of a character's morality.

As previously mentioned, future work could investigate different approaches to increase participants' likelihood of taking on the subjective experience of a character engaging in an immoral behavior. In providing readers with a legitimate reason for the immoral behavior, the morality of the behavior may not play a role in simulating the subjective experience of the character. Readers may justify the immoral behavior because of the specific situation.

## **Conclusion**

The phenomenon of simulating the subjective experience of an immoral character is easily shown through the character of Severus Snape in the popular book series *Harry Potter*. Snape's immoral actions leave some readers appalled while others have written essays justifying his actions and behaviors (Berman, 2007). Harnessing what makes Snape an attractive immoral character will help elucidate the key factors that might promote high levels of subjective

experience-taking with a character who commits wrongdoing - and cause readers to follow suit in their own behavior after emerging from the narrative world.

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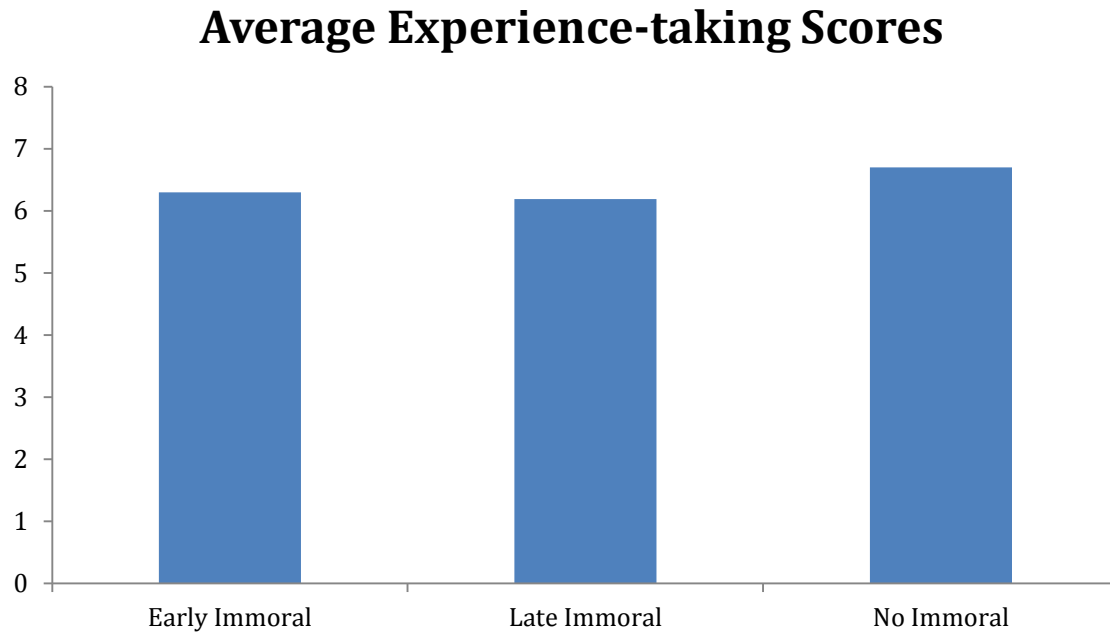


Figure 1. Means of experience-taking scores by condition. No significant differences were found between conditions.  $F(2,64)=2.218$ ,  $p=.12$ .



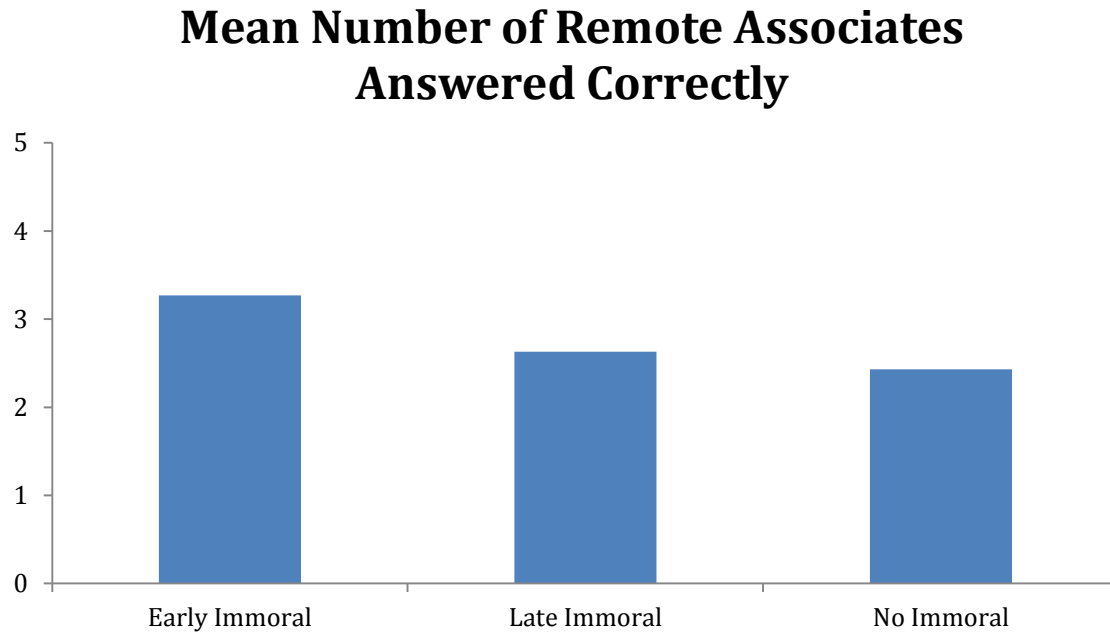


Figure 2: Mean Number of Remote Associates Answered Correctly by Condition.  $F(2,66) = .876$ ,  $p=.42$ .

Table 1: Character Evaluations by Narrative Condition

Narrative Condition	<u>Good</u>		<u>Similar to Me</u>		<u>Likable</u>		<u>We Think Alike</u>	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
No Immoral Behavior	7.09	1.59	5.91	2.37	6.96	2.06	6.08	2.50
Early Immoral Behavior	6.18	1.37	5.77	1.85	6.41	2.11	5.82	1.89
Late Immoral Behavior	6.13	2.21	5.79	2.21	6.83	1.58	6.00	1.98
Both Immoral Behavior Conditions	6.15	1.61	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 2: Visual Imagery Scores by Narrative Condition

Narrative Condition	<u>Perspective</u>		<u>Maintenance</u>	
	M	SD	M	SD
No Immoral Behavior	3.59	2.00	4.61	2.27
Early Immoral Behavior	4.20	1.78	4.36	1.81
Late Immoral Behavior	4.25	1.98	4.71	2.14

Note: 7 point scale. Higher perspective score = third person visual perspective. Higher maintenance = did not shift between first and third person visual perspective.